
Why Do Polish Women Want to Stay Childless? Analysis of Voluntary Childlessness Motives

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Abstract: The phenomenon of voluntary childlessness is increasingly apparent in the modern world contributing to the problem of an ageing society. There are numerous motives of voluntary childlessness indicated in the literature that are especially related to the decisions of women. The aim of this study was the identification of the motives for voluntary childlessness among Polish women using internet debate analysis. The analysis indicated nine motives: desire for freedom, the need for peace and solitude, reluctance to make sacrifices/to take additional responsibilities, dislike of children, fear of pregnancy and childbirth, fear of potential disease of a child, environmental motives, the lack of maternal instinct and bad childhood experiences that can be classified in three categories.

Keywords: voluntary childlessness, motives of childlessness, qualitative study

1. Introduction

Changes in procreative decisions among women, who decide to have fewer children or no children at all, are results of some transitions that have taken place in the modern world that can be explained in reference to theories such as post-material values theory, preference theory, rational choice theory, uncertainty theory and gender quality theory (see Tanturri et al., 2015). The increase in the proportion of highly educated women and changes directed towards gender equality allowed women to participate actively in the job market, therefore increasing the cost of the opportunity cost of having children. Another important aspect is also visible change in the lifestyle of modern people. Furthermore, advances in contraception have resulted in its better quality and made it more accessible for women. This tendencies are reflected in the value of the fertility rate in Poland that decreased from 2.2 in 1970 to 1.32 in 2021 (GUS), in turn, in 2000 the average age of a mother giving birth to her first child was less than 24, while in 2019 this was 27.6 years (EUROSTAT).

Voluntary childlessness is a phenomenon that is the subject of public discussion in Poland because the proportion of voluntary childless people seems to be increasing. The term 'voluntary childless' is used to describe those who are biologically able but do not intentionally want to have children, unlike people who are involuntary childless (due to medical reasons) or temporarily childless (assuming having child in the future).

In Poland, a country where nearly 94% citizens declare affiliation to a religious denomination, mainly to the Roman Catholic Church that strongly emphasises the importance of procreation, and over 80% perceived themselves as believers (GUS, 2018), not having a child is considered as some kind of deviation from the accepted norms. A study conducted by CBOS (2019) showed that 80% respondents (86% among women) see family happiness as the most important value in their life, and only 65% perceived marriage without children as a family (a decrease of 6 percentage points compared to 2013), which explains the meaning of having a 'complete' family in Polish society. In this context, it seems very interesting to analyse why Polish women decide to go against accepted norms and voluntarily not have children, taking also into account that in Poland motherhood has always been considered central to feminine identity.

Miettinen and Szalma (2014) using data from the Eurobarometer Survey, indicated that in 2011, 2.6% of Polish women aged 18-40 intended to have no children (0,8 percentage point more than in 2006), which was a much lower proportion than in most European countries, especially from Western and Central Europe, and two times lower than the EU27 average (5.2%). However, according to data from the FAMWELL project – a study carried out at the Warsaw School of Economics – life without children is being chosen by an increasing number of women. Among women born in 1945-1955, 8% never gave birth, whilst among women born in 1965 this was over 15%, being one of the highest levels in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the projections made by Sobotka (2012 as cited in Tanturri et al., 2015), showed that over 20% of Polish women born in 1975 remain childless. The results of the Generation and Gender Survey (Kotowska, Matysiak, and Mynarska, 2016) indicated that 12% of women aged 18-39 did not intend to have any children at all, i.e. a 1 percentage point increase between the first and the second stage of the survey (2011-2015). Furthermore, in line with the report of CBOS (2023), 42% of currently childless women aged 18-45 do not plan to have children or do not know whether they will. In comparison, in 2017 it was 22% (CBOS, 2017).

Research has shown that voluntary childlessness is correlated with some socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes. Voluntary childless women are more likely to be highly educated (Berrington, 2017; Biddlecom and Martin, 2006) to have higher incomes (Abma and Martinez, 2006), to be less religious and more politically liberal (Avison and Furnham, 2015). Voluntary childlessness is also negatively associated with traditional gender role beliefs (Waren and Pals, 2013). However, the most interesting issue seems to be the answer about the motivation of women for voluntary childlessness. In the literature, numerous motives are indicated. They are mainly connected with aspects such as the need to maintain freedom and control over their life, reluctance to sacrifice and to change their past lifestyle, the need for self-fulfillment and a successful professional life, general dislike of children, lack of maternal instinct or financial concern related to having a child. Furthermore, some important aspects are connected with the willingness to maintain satisfactory relationship with their partner, and fears expressed by women in connection not only with the timing of pregnancy and delivery, but also with later life with a child, also concerning health of the child and doubts about the ability to be a parent. Issues connected with care about the state of the natural environment and the problem of overpopulation in the modern world are also significant.

The aim of this study was the identification of the motives of voluntary childlessness among Polish women using a qualitative method of analysis – the analysis of internet debate. The article is divided into seven sections, starting with the introduction. The core of the second section is the concept of childlessness, the third presents the motives of childlessness indicated in the literature and in the fourth, the perception of childless women is described. The subsequent two sections are description of data and method and the analysis of results, followed by the conclusion. The main contribution of

this study is using a method that, to the best of the author's knowledge, was never before been applied to study voluntary childlessness. In this qualitative approach, people whose opinions are the subject of the analysis, are unfettered by the researcher's presence and can freely express their feelings and perceptions, what allows to obtain very reliable results. Furthermore, taking into account the difficult demographic situation in Poland, it seems to be very valuable to understand why an increasing number of Polish women do not decide to be a mother.

2. Concept of Childlessness

The term 'childlessness' is applied to describe those people who have never had, and currently do not have, any biologically or socially related children and thus have never assumed the role or identity of a mother or father (Rich, Taket, Graham, and Shelley, 2011). However, this term does not specify the reason for this situation. In the literature, researchers make a distinction between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' childlessness (Avison and Furnham, 2015; Houseknecht, 1987; Veevers, 1973, 1979) that often reflects the difference between biological and other reasons for childlessness. However, besides medical issues, sometimes not having a partner is also determined as the reason for involuntary childlessness. Another form of distinguishing the reason for not having offspring is using terms „childless by choice” or „childless by circumstances” (Cannold, 2004; Carmichael and Whittaker, 2007), connected with a similar way of thinking. Within the term of 'childless by choice' Dariotis (2004) indicates three groups: early articulators who make the decision about not having children early in their life (typically during mid-to-late teenage years and early twenties); late articulators who decide in the later stages of their life (during their twenties through early thirties, attributing often this decision to career and lifestyle factors), and perpetual postponers who passively choose a life without children because of a sequence of decisions, believing the time was not right to have children. It should be mentioned that this distinction emphasises not only the timing of the decision but also pays attention to whether it is active or passive. Postponing the decision about having a child may result in involuntary childlessness because the fecund period of women is limited by their age (Buhr and Huinink, 2017).

Currently, the term 'childfree' is often used in reference to those who intentionally do not decide to have children, instead of the term 'childless'. Childfree is more positive than childless, indicating a free choice made by a particular person rather than a loss (Agrillo and Nelini, 2008; see also Bartlett, 1995). This seems to be especially important in reference to the issue that freedom is one of the reasons that are the most often mentioned as a motive to be childless (Houseknecht, 1987). Peterson (2014) identified two discourses of freedom important for the construction of the childfree position. The first are the positive experiences of freedom in everyday lives and definition of freedom as part of deep-rooted identity. The second discourse involves negative aspects – the perception of children as a risk, motherhood as time-consuming and parents as 'trapped'.

3. Motives of Childlessness – Literature Review

Waren and Pals (2013) described four theories explaining voluntary childlessness among women: demographic variation, socialisation, neo-classical economics and attitudinal variation. The first – demographic variation – perceives voluntary childlessness as a result of different characteristics. The variables such as age, race and being (or not) married seem to play a role, where older, white and unmarried women are more likely to be categorised as voluntary childless. According to the socialisation or life course theory, delays in leaving the parental home and in marrying increase the probability of remaining childless, and in turn, being Catholic decreases this probability due to pronatalist views of this religion. In reference to neo-classical economic theory, highly-educated women and women with high incomes, and with longer work experience are more likely to be voluntarily childless, which is linked with better economic opportunities (see also Rowland, 2007). In turn, the attitudinal variables

theory see conservatism (religious, political and gender-role) as a factor that attenuates childlessness. The authors conducted empirical study and found that demographic and socialisation variables predict voluntary childlessness for both men and women in a similar way. In reference to economic theory, they pointed out that education does not appear to be a significant predictor of voluntary childlessness for men, however, it greatly increases the likelihood of being voluntarily childless among women. Furthermore, traditional gender role belief decreases the chance of being voluntarily childless in the case of both genders, but the effect is slightly stronger among women.

Individual motives of being voluntarily childless also seems to be a very interesting issue. Houseknecht (1987) on the basis of a literature review, indicated the main reasons for being voluntarily childless, namely: freedom from child-care responsibility/greater opportunity for self-fulfillment and spontaneous mobility, more satisfactory marital relationship, female career considerations, monetary advantages, concern about population growth, general dislike of children, early socialisation experiences/doubts about ability to parent, concern about physical aspects of childbirth and recovery and concern for children, given the world's condition. In more recent studies, the motives of voluntary childlessness appear to be very similar. Park (2005) described the perception of parenting as conflicting with career and "leisure identities", and claimed the lack of a maternal instinct or disinterest in children as the main reasons of being voluntarily childless. Hird and Abshoff (2000) pointed out that the perception of pregnancy and childbirth in a negative way as difficult and traumatic connected with pain, discomfort, lack of dignity both in terms of child-birth experience and the medical treatment during pregnancy, is also an important determinant in deciding not to have children.

Gillespie (2003), on the basis of a qualitative study, identified two motivational factors which determined the decision to remain childfree, i.e. the "attraction of pull of being childfree" and the "rejection or the push away from motherhood". The first expresses the need for enhanced freedom, increased autonomy, wider opportunities, improved financial position and closer intimate relationships. The second is characterised by the perception of significant burden, sacrifice and loss that are connected with motherhood (rejection of activities associated with being a mother). The loss of one's own identity and independence is also important from this viewpoint. Ciaccio (2006, as cited in Agrillo and Nelini, 2008) distinguished four groups of main reasons for being childless: lack of desire of become parents (lack of parental instinct, general dislike of the behaviour of children), personal advancement (not wanting to sacrifice privacy/personal space and time for children, not wanting to commit to increased financial responsibility or burden, belief that childbearing would reduce career advancement), physical and health concerns (concern that child would inherit a hereditary disease), belief that it is a generous act not to bring more people into the world (concern regarding environmental factors and/or overpopulation).

Avison and Furnham (2015) conducted an analysis with VARIMAX rotation and suggested the five main factors related to reasons of being childless: the most popular reasons for voluntary childlessness (desire for freedom and independence, a lack of interest in parenting, concerns that having children would be expensive, stressful or restrict lifestyle), physical and medical concerns (the risk of disabled child, fear about passing on a genetic condition, risk or physical effects of pregnancy or childbirth), reason of particular relevance to women (the impact of children on career, the physical effects or risk of childbirth, unequal sharing of childcare), intrinsic reasons relating to character (lack of parental instinct, disinterest in child-rearing, not enjoying being around children, feeling of possibility of being bad parent). The summary of childlessness motives based on the literature review is presented in Table 1.

Holland and Keizer (2015) found that partnership-oriented respondents were less likely to have a first child. A similar result was presented by Buhr and Huinink (2017), who investigated the reasons why childless women and men, who initially considered having children, gave up on having them during their life course. They indicated that respondents with a partner who highly valued living in a partnership are more likely to give up on having children. The explanation of this association is based on the assumption that the partnership might be treated as a substitute for parenthood in this case.

Table 1. Motives of voluntary childlessness

Motives related to...	References to literature
Lifestyle	freedom from child-care responsibility, greater opportunity for spontaneous mobility (Houseknecht, 1987), perception of parenting as conflicting leisured identities (Park, 2005), need for enhanced freedom and increased autonomy, perception of significant burden, sacrifice and loss associated with motherhood, the loss of one's own identity and independence (Gillespie, 2003), reluctance to sacrifice privacy/personal space and time for children (Ciaccio, 2006, as cited in Agrillo and Nelini, 2008), desire for freedom and independence, concerns that having children would be stressful or restrict lifestyle (Avison and Furnham, 2015)
Characteristics of women	general dislike of children, doubts about ability to parent (Houseknecht, 1987), the lack of a maternal instinct, disinterest in children (Park, 2005), lack of parental instinct, general dislike of the behaviour of children (Ciaccio, 2006, as cited in Agrillo and Nelini, 2008), lack of interest in parenting, lack of parental instinct, disinterest in child-rearing, not enjoying being around children, feeling of possibility of being bad parent (Avison and Furnham, 2015)
Physical and health concerns	concern about physical aspects of childbirth and recovery (Houseknecht, 1987), perception of pregnancy and childbirth as difficult and traumatic connected with pain, discomfort and lack of dignity (Hird and Abshoff, 2000), concern about hereditary diseases (Ciaccio, 2006, as cited in Agrillo and Nelini, 2008), the risk of disabled child, fear about passing on a genetic condition, risk or physical effects of pregnancy or childbirth (Avison and Furnham, 2015)
Professional life and self-fulfillment	greater opportunity for self-fulfillment, female career considerations (Houseknecht, 1987), perception of parenting as conflicting with career (Park, 2005), need for wider opportunities (Gillespie, 2003), belief that childbearing would reduce career advancement (Ciaccio, 2006, as cited in Agrillo and Nelini, 2008), the impact of children on women's career (Avison and Furnham, 2015)
Financial aspects	monetary advantages (Houseknecht, 1987), need for improved financial position (Gillespie, 2003), reluctance to commit increased financial responsibility or burden (Ciaccio, 2006, as cited in Agrillo and Nelini, 2008), concerns that having children would be expensive (Avison and Furnham, 2015)
Environmental issues	concern about population growth, concern for children taking into account world condition (Houseknecht, 1987), concern regarding environmental factors and/or overpopulation (Ciaccio, 2006, as cited in Agrillo and Nelini, 2008)
Relations	more satisfactory marital relationship (Houseknecht, 1987), need for closer intimate relationships (Gillespie, 2003)
Other aspects	unequal sharing of childcare (Avison and Furnham, 2015), early socialization experiences (Houseknecht, 1987)

Source: own work based on literature review.

It should be mentioned that motives to not have children are not the same for women and men. Furthermore, contrary to women, there is not a well-defined age limit to male reproduction. Park (2005) pointed out that women more often express the incongruence of parenthood and career and underscore the lack of maternal instinct, in turn, men more often decide to be childless because of financial reasons.

4. Perception of Childless Women

Research has shown that parents are perceived as warmer, kinder, more caring and more nurturing compared to people not having children, especially those who described themselves as childfree and not planning to have children in the future. Moreover, the childless were seen as more emotionally troubled but also as having happier, less conflicted marriages (Kopper and Smith, 2001; Koropeczyk-Cox, Copur Romano, and Cody-Rydzewski, 2018). Gillespie (2000) indicated that women who voluntarily decided to stay childless are often seen as selfish, hard 'career women', ruthless and unfeminine. Furthermore, they often experience lack of regard in reference to their decision about childlessness expressed by words like "you will change your mind" or assumptions that they will ultimately come to

regret childlessness. In this context, voluntary childlessness is perceived as deviance. Rich et al. (2013) also emphasised marginalised social positions of childless women because of perception of them as deviant, unnatural and selfish. On the basis of in-depth interviews, they revealed five key themes as important facets of the experiences of childless women, in terms of distinctions between 'natural' mothers and 'unnatural' childless women, perception of woman as a mother, seeing childlessness as a discrediting attribute, feeling of being undervalued and the significance of being childless. It should be highlighted that the experiences shared by the women in this study seemed to be shaped by this socio-cultural synonymy between woman and mother, which depicted childless women as misfits.

5. Data and Method

The analysis of motives of childlessness was conducted with the use of a qualitative method, where the Internet discussion was a data source. Data were collected from the comments sections on the website Bezdziennik.pl and became the subject of analysis. This website is devoted to contents related to the life and problems of childless people, mainly women. The analysis concerned nearly 4000 users' comments, published from February 2018 to April 2022, where nearly 200 of them were directly related to the reasons for being childless.

Internet forums are a valuable source of data because they are mainly used by people who are members or supporters of the community for discussing matters of concern of the respective interest group, which allows for the analysis of typical discourses within these communities (Holtz, Kronberger, and Wagner, 2012). In reference to this method of research, Holtz et al. (2012) underlined that the online discussion provide 'natural data', where contributions made by other forum users provoke new and more detailed responses. Furthermore, relative anonymity is the motivation for more openness compared to face-to-face research methods. However, considering potential issues of this method, the authors indicated that anonymity is usually related to lack or very limited socio-demographic information. Moreover, users can tend to express more offensive and more extreme statements, nevertheless the problem of offensiveness was not recognised by the author during the conducting analysis of comments section on Bezdziennik.pl, where comments that were full of emotions, were a valuable source of data taking into account the nature of the analysed topic.

Online discussion has been applied to study a range of issues, for example: recent ex-smoker (Burri, Baujard, and Etter, 2006), autism (Jordan and Caldwell-Harris, 2012), male infertility (Beeder and Samplaski, 2019), conspiracy vs. science (Zhang, Wang, Zhu, and Wang, 2021) and racism (Shrikant, 2022).

6. Results of Analysis

The analysis of comments allowed for the identification of nine motives for staying childless: desire for freedom, reluctance to make sacrifices/to take additional responsibilities, need for peace and solitude, dislike of children, fear of pregnancy and childbirth, fear of potential disease of a child, environmental motives related to condition of the world, lack of maternal instinct and bad childhood experiences. However, it should be mentioned that the decision about remaining childless is often multidimensional and is rarely connected with only one reason.

6.1. Desire for Freedom

In reference to desire for freedom, the important aspects emphasised by users were the need for free, unlimited choices, self-development, spontaneity, independence and fear of losing one's life. Women stressed that life without children gives them a chance to decide about themselves not only in the

context of professional work but also in relation to leisure time and improving relationship with their partner.

- *Freedom from these worries, **freedom to decide about yourself**: your work, emigration, **freedom from being a slave** to the needs of a child, and finally freedom from constant fear for someone totally dependent on me – this is my little happiness.*
- *I **love my independence** and the fact that I can pack my things into one suitcase and go anywhere without turning the little man's life upside down with subsequent moves or not spending as much time as would be appropriate for a child.*
- *I travel a lot, also very spontaneously. In one year I was able to travel to three continents. **A child would take that freedom away from me.***
- *I fulfill myself in a different way, I don't want such changes in my body and in my life, I don't want one more person in the middle of my relationship, **I don't want my freedom restricted**, I don't want additional responsibility for a child.*
- *On the other hand, the thought of having a child paralyses me with fear, the fear of losing what I have – **a kind of freedom, being independent.***

6.2. Reluctance to Make Sacrifices/to Take Additional Responsibilities

In the context of reluctance to make sacrifices/to take additional responsibilities, the child was perceived as a limitation, enormous, inalienable, full-time responsibility and having a child as the necessity to put the child's needs before one's own and sacrificing one's own needs.

- *I want to have my own life, which **I don't want to sacrifice it to someone.***
- *I don't want children and it's my conscious choice. For some people, child is a treasure and a dream, **I see it as pain, limitation and constantly putting someone else's needs above your own.***
- *I fear that I would never be free again, that I would not be able to do what I want to do at the moment, that **I would have responsibility for another human being 24/7.***
- *Most of all, **I don't want to spend the rest of my life subordinating myself to someone else's needs.** Work because you have to support the child, **give up everything** because of the child's needs.*

6.3. The Need for Peace and Solitude

The motive connected with the need for peace and solitude was expressed by stressing the need to spend time alone, love of silence and order and fear of constant noise, especially in the case of being an introvert person.

- *However, I can't imagine having another man with me who won't be able to live without me. **I need me and a moment for myself in solitude to live***
- *I am hypersensitive to sounds and noise, **I have a strong need for independence and peace, children would make me nervous.***
- *I **highly value time spent alone with myself like every introvert** – the thought that the first years of motherhood I would not have it at all scares me and I know in advance what it would result in – frustration and perhaps depression.*
- *I **love peace and quiet.** Children's screams, laughter, bustle, crying affect me like a red rag to a bull.*
- *I'm [an introvert], **one of the main reasons for my childlessness** (...) I can't imagine coming after a whole day of work to a child who is forever glued to you.*

6.4. Dislike of Children

Motive of staying voluntary childless was also dislike of children and perception of them as noisy and annoying, what results in not wanting to be around them and not being able to spend time with children.

- *I **don't like the company of children**, they are too noisy, busy, and I value solitude and quiet (...) And I am actually irritated by the proximity of children, I get tired if I meet a friend who has a small child*

- *I like my life as it is now, I never liked children and I knew that motherhood is not my way to fulfill myself (...) Children annoy me a lot, new-born babies disgust me.*
- *I'm 36 years old, I have the impression that society has been trying to force me to have children all my life, and I have always, really never liked them, I don't want Them!*

6.5. The Lack of Maternal Instinct

Besides aspects connected with personal traits and concerns, women also emphasised biological issues that determines their reluctance to have a child – lack of maternal instinct, sometimes even despite waiting for its emergence.

- *I've never added an ideology to my childlessness, motherhood just didn't appeal to me, and nature deprived me of my [maternal] instincts*
- *I am 27 years old, I am single, but I have never felt and still do not feel the maternal instinct.*
- *I've never felt the so called "instinct". I'm 38 years old, I've been waiting for it and I know it won't come, I don't feel the need and I've never felt it, although the fear of this decision has always accompanied me.*
- *I've never felt a strong maternal drive, even the thought of having children aroused strong cognitive dissonance in me.*

6.6. Fear of Pregnancy and Childbirth

The motive of fear of pregnancy, childbirth and other physiological aspects connected with this is expressed by association with pain and possible complications and side effects. Moreover, it is stimulated by reservations and concerns about the care of pregnant women in our country.

- *Just thinking about the process of pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding makes me sick. I've always known that I definitely don't want to go through this and I'm happy.*
- *I have terrible associations with motherhood from rudeness in delivery rooms, through poorly performed caesarean section and almost loss of life by a friend, to cutting the crotch in the delivery room, and badly performed deliveries where the child is hurt.*
- *Childbirth - apart from pain, pain and more pain, it is also a possible whole package of complications and side effects (...).*
- *The vision of pregnancy and childbirth scares me the most.*
- *I am paralysed by fear of what might happen. There are so many possibilities of the effects of pregnancy and childbirth for me, so many possibilities of diseases and complications for the baby. It's too much for me. My biggest fear is breastfeeding, being tethered to my baby.*
- *Childbirth, pregnancy and all this post-pregnancy physiology evokes, to put it mildly, rejection in me.*

6.7. Fear of Potential Disease of a Child

Fear of potential disease affecting children means that women are concerned that they have no guarantee that the child will be healthy, also in reference to mental health aspects. This was also related to fear that the potential disease of the child will require taking additional responsibility (often to the end of mother's life) and the need to sacrifice one's own life.

- *The second issue is the health of the child. In the same way, no one will give me a guarantee that I would give birth to a 100% healthy child. Yes, there are prenatal tests, but they won't even detect autism or mental disorders.*
- *What if I give birth to a child affected with a disability? I have nothing against people with disabilities and I am not in favor of introducing the law like it was in Sparta (...). All I know is that I wouldn't be able to afford such a sacrifice. With a healthy child there is a lot of work, let alone with a terminally ill child.*
- *Why don't we want children? I said – first of all, I have a phobia of autism – it scares me that it can't be seen in the prenatal examination, you carry it, you give birth in pain, the child grows and*

suddenly stops reciprocating your parental love, it doesn't see you, you're just a breadwinner, nurse, caretaker, what a life?! Such a child will never become independent, such a child will not help old parents, will not take care of them, such a child generates costs, nerves and marriage breakdown faster than the lack of a child, unfortunately these are the facts.

6.8. Environmental Motives

In the context of environmental motives of voluntary childlessness, the many modern threats in the world such as climate change, cataclysms, wars, brutality and the issue of overpopulation and overexploitation of the planet were underlined. It was also related to the fear that children would be suffering and not safe and/or happy living in such a world and to the belief that the planet is not able to cope with such a number of people also taking into account the extinction of numerous species of plants and animals.

- **Too much evil is happening here on Earth.** *Psychiatric and psychological clinics are overcrowded. It is proof that people just can't handle it anymore. I have seen and still see too much suffering to fund someone's life here.*
- *For me, the well-being of our planet is an important issue, and I have a certain feeling that I don't want to raise a child to this crowded world, full of brutality and stupidity (...) Almost as if I were to create a person and condemn him/her to live in a world overwhelmed by war and cataclysms, just to ensure the meaning of life for myself/ project for years.*
- *I see no point in bringing more human beings into the world who are destroying, plundering our planet. My heart breaks when I hear more reports about endangered species of plants and animals, how there is still not enough space for humans, so forests are cut down for cultivation. And this ubiquitous consumerism is driven to the limit.*
- **The last thing our overpopulated, 'milked' and poisoned planet needs is more people.** *Given climate change, the rise of technology towards automation, rising political tensions, I wonder: what will happen to today's generation of children when they grow up? Possibly a brutal fight for survival for which they are absolutely unprepared.*

6.9. Bad Experiences from Childhood

Reluctance to have a child may have its source in childhood experiences and it is connected with childhood abuse (physical and psychological) and bad parenting patterns. Women who are not satisfied with their own childhood, sometimes also perceive themselves as not able to be a good parent. Their own mental disorders, being the result of difficult experiences also seem to play a role.

- **I have a lot of resentment towards my own toxic parents,** *because of whom I can't cope with myself, let alone with a child (...) maybe if I wasn't scarred by my own parents, maybe I would like to have children, or maybe it would be easier to convince me.*
- **Having a monster mother,** *I thought that there could be nothing worse than being her victim, but I realised that becoming such an executioner for someone, forged on the foundations of the victim, with the memory of the victim, with the pain of the victim and the reactions of the executioner and victim alternately (e.g. under negative emotions) would be worse for me. Monsters breed wounds, and wounds breed monsters.*
- *Problems with difficult childhood and subsequent emotional disorders are also my reason for childlessness.*
- *I knew it already when I was 13, maybe because since I was a child I had to take care of my two younger brothers, I was even their nanny. Then, until I was 19, I watched my parents fail to raise the three of us, and it put me off having children forever.*

6.10. Other Corresponding Studies. The Study's Implications

The motives of voluntary childlessness that were isolated during the analysis are generally consistent with those described previously in the literature, which clearly indicates that Polish women are not different compared to women from other countries, which can be also related to the process of

convergence of lifestyles and globalization. Furthermore, it also means that decisions about childlessness are embedded in the similar mindsets, therefore, expressing the same feelings and fears of women. Naturally, some aspects such as fears connected with quality of perinatal care potentially can be stronger in this country than in places where the medical care of pregnant women and their children is better. However, it seems that the basis of anxiety reflected by fear of unexpected events (such as complications in childbirth, side effects of pregnancy and childbirth, disease of child) stay rather the same. The analysis also showed that aspects connected with the environment and unpredictable events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and wars are gaining strength, making the perception of the world as less friendly or less secure for new generations. Yet, it should be mentioned that one aspect that was not strongly indicated in the reviewed literature, but was isolated in the conducted study regarded the meaning of difficult experiences from childhood as a possible motive for childlessness among Polish women. However, this issue can be partly related to doubts in the ability to be a good parent, which was more often expressed in the literature. Interestingly, the aspects that were rarely indicated by women in this study were these connected with one's professional career and financial situation.

The results of the analysis allow for a discussion of the potential implications of this study. The conducted analysis showed that a majority of motives behind voluntary childlessness was connected with aspects that seem to be independent of family policy solutions. This means that even potential improvement in the area of support for families such as granting additional benefits for families or introducing additional profamily solutions on the labour market can have a minor impact on decisions of voluntarily childless women, which may be connected with their specific perception of motherhood. Undeniably, the arrival of a child in a woman's life changes many things and is associated with taking on additional responsibilities regardless of state support in this regard. As mentioned before, financial concerns were relatively rarely indicated as a reason to remain childless. Nonetheless, one aspect that seems to be possible to change is an improvement of the quality of health care to mitigate the fear of women in this field.

7. Conclusion

The conducted analysis enabled distinguishing motives of voluntary childlessness among Polish women. It is possible to order the motives into three groups connected with the personal traits of woman (desire for freedom, reluctance to make sacrifices/to take additional responsibilities, the need for peace and solitude, dislike of children, the lack of maternal instinct), with particular concerns (fear of pregnancy and childbirth, fear of a potential disease of a child, and the environmental motives) and with bad experiences during their lifetime. It is interesting that economic concerns were rarely indicated as the reason for postponing or not choosing motherhood.

Voluntary childlessness among Polish women has a multidimensional basis, and many motives can be given for decisions that are consistent with the motives indicated in the literature. It should be stressed that decisions of staying childless are often grounded on a few reasons at the same time, and surely those identified above are not a closed book.

Bezdzietnik.pl is a space where people in addition to reading articles related to childlessness, can express their opinions, feelings and considerations regarding childlessness, especially voluntary childlessness. Due to the anonymity (only the nicknames of users are known), they can freely present their opinions without concerns that somebody, especially from the immediate neighbourhood, can recognise the authors of the comments. This kind of freedom of expression allowed for gathering a very valuable and reliable set of data. Emotionality that is an inherent part of some comments can be a result of low acceptance and incomprehension of voluntary childlessness in Poland. A sense of disagreement with the perception of childlessness by choice as a deviation by a relatively large part of society is reflected in the comments. In Poland there is strong pressure to have children, therefore

a public admission to opt for voluntary childlessness is very often a source of unfavorable remarks, also included in the users' statements. According to the data from the European Social Survey, nearly 32% of respondents in Poland disapprove if the woman chooses never to have children, of which over 10% strongly disapprove of this decision. It seems that a substantive discussion about voluntary childlessness is only starting in Poland, because this phenomenon is relatively new in comparison to Western Europe, where this tendency had been observed much earlier. In this context, future research should focus on the perception of voluntary childlessness by Polish society, not only in reference to decisions made by women, but also men, taking into account also socio-economic characteristics and values of respondents.

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Dlaczego polskie kobiety chcą pozostać bezdzietne? Analiza motywów dobrowolnej bezdzietności

Streszczenie: Zjawisko dobrowolnej bezdzietności staje się coraz bardziej widoczne we współczesnym świecie, przyczyniając się do problemu starzenia się społeczeństw. W literaturze wskazano wiele motywów dobrowolnej bezdzietności. Celem badania była identyfikacja motywów dobrowolnej bezdzietności wśród polskich kobiet na podstawie analizy komentarzy zamieszczanych w Internecie. Analiza wskazała na funkcjonowanie dziewięciu motywów, które stanowią: pragnienie wolności, potrzeba spokoju i samotności, niechęć do poświęceń/wzięcia na siebie dodatkowej odpowiedzialności, nielubienie dzieci, lęk przed ciężką i porodem, lęk przed potencjalną chorobą dziecka, motywy środowiskowe, brak instynktu macierzyńskiego oraz złe doświadczenia z dzieciństwa. Motywy te mogą być sklasyfikowane w trzech kategoriach.

Słowa kluczowe: dobrowolna bezdzietność, motywy bezdzietności, badanie jakościowe
